

05 SEP 1985

DDI #03672-85  
3 September 1985

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence  
FROM : Deputy Director for Intelligence  
SUBJECT : South African Estimate

Bill -  
1. Just between us, I'm not very happy with the way the South African estimate came out. It seems to me that we essentially ask only one question -- whether or not the South African regime will survive -- and then offer an equivocal answer. We say they have the resources necessary to survive but then kind of throw up our hands and say that there are a lot of unpredictable external and internal forces that could lead to collapse of the regime. Although that is a bit of an unfair oversimplification, it is still essentially the bottom line of the estimate.

2. It seems to me that the way we should be addressing this issue at this point is to begin with an assumption that few experts now would quarrel with: because of the events of the last year or so, South Africa has been changed in fundamental ways.

-- The assumptions and perceptions of whites, blacks, the business community, the politicians and the international community have all changed.

3. If one acknowledges that a real change in assumptions/perceptions has taken place in and about South Africa, the important questions then are how much has changed and what kind of future is in prospect in light of these undisputed changes. The Economist, in the attached very interesting article, postulates two scenarios -- degenerative collapse and a state of siege. I think our people and virtually everyone who coordinated the estimate would say that a state of siege is the more likely outcome. I would ask, however, whether a state of siege in a country of South Africa's size and composition can be stable or is a state of siege simply a way station on the way to more dramatic change.

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4. I am struck by how adamant analysts throughout the Community are in their view of the likely survival of the white regime. But the real, operational question for the United States perhaps is not whether the white regime will survive but what kind of regime will it be, how strong it will be, its economic prospects, what its relationships with the outside world will be, the degree of internal violence (civil war?), opportunities for external meddling, the implications for South Africa's regional security role and so forth. A South Africa in a state of siege or totally preoccupied with internal economic and political difficulties has very real impact on our interests in Southern Africa. Thus, I think we have taken too superficial a cut at this problem in the estimate and I plan to ask John Helgersen to have his people think more in the terms described above.

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Robert M. Gates  
Deputy Director for Intelligence

Attachment:  
As Stated

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